

Thanks for the Memories

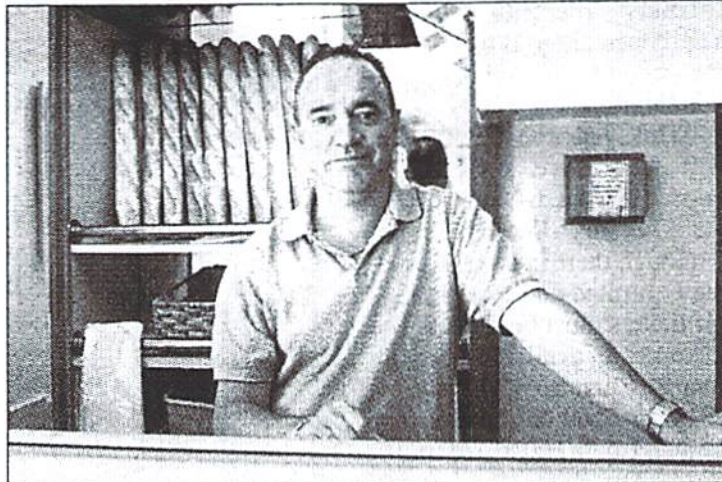
Local bakery celebrates 20 sweet years

By JUSTIN GRAEBER, CLIPPER EDITOR
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If Philippe Odier's parents had let him pursue his dreams of playing the saxophone, we may never have tasted one of his chocolate croissant masterpieces.

Luckily, Odier's father encouraged him to join the family business as a baker, and for the last 20 years Duxbury residents have been reaping the sweet rewards.

Odier and his wife Debbie are the entrepreneurs behind French Memories, a bakery and sandwich shop located in the former Sweetser's building in Snug Harbor. At French Memories, shop-



Paris-trained pastry chef Philippe Odier has been supplying Duxbury with tasty baked goods for 20 years.

pers can taste any one of the variety of pastries Odier has been perfecting since his formative years.

Odier was born into a culinary family, in Paris, France.

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"My grandfather was a baker, my father was a pastry chef," he said.

The kitchen permeated every aspect of his childhood. When he misbehaved, often his punishment involved getting up early and heading to the kitchen to perform menial tasks, like removing the stems from strawberries.

Although Odier harbored dreams of becoming a professional musician, he was encouraged by his father to continue in the family tradition, and soon found himself apprenticed to another pastry chef in Paris. He worked for two years, going to school one week a month and then working in the kitchen for the other three, to earn his degree.

"It came very naturally to me," Odier said. "I had been helping my father bake since I was very little."



FRENCH MEMORIES

Name: French Memories Bakery

Location: 459 Washington Street

Features: Gourmet French pastries and breads, sandwiches and coffee. From their Web site: From freshly made croissants to decadent cakes, you'll feel like you've stepped into an enchanted parlor."

Phone: 781-934-9020

Web site: www.cafevanille-boston.com

At the age of 25, he headed to the United States, to San Francisco, California, on a one-year work visa. He worked as a pastry chef and returned to France when the visa expired, but with a new goal in his heart.

"I was so amazed by the country," he said. "I had nothing else in mind but coming back."

Eventually, Odier moved to Florida and began to work for a bakery near Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Golf Club. He met his wife, Debbie, who was a sales rep for the company, and made a name for himself by winning a contest held by Burger King to create a croissant for their breakfast sandwich.

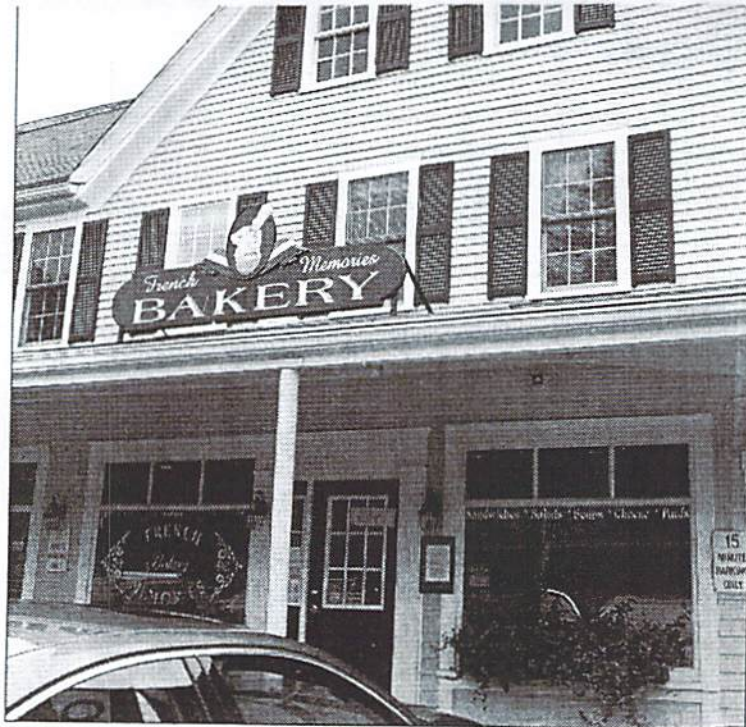
Eventually, he grew weary of the strain of baking 15,000 croissants a day for the hamburger chain, and longed to set up his own shop.

"That was not really for me," he said.

Odier returned to France for a six-month period, to re-familiarize himself with the rapidly-changing technology and techniques of the pastry world.

Eventually he and his wife wound up in Boston, where he says the narrow cobblestone streets of the Beacon Hill neighborhood reminded him of Europe.

He ended up in Duxbury, he said, by "pure luck." The couple was looking for a bakery to buy when the former Sweetser's grocery shop was being sold. The new owner



The French Memories Bakery has been a Snug Harbor staple for two decades.

wanted to run the supermarket, but had little interest in the bakery.

Odier and his wife took the plunge, but he admits he had reservations. Friends had been telling them Duxbury was a tough town to start a business. But they couldn't have been more wrong about French Memories.

The first Saturday the bakery was open, Odier had to close early — at 11 a.m. — because the product was sold out. This trend continued for several weeks, and soon the bakery's fame had spread around town.

"The community was so welcoming," said Debbie Odier.

French Memories is a "totally French" bakery, says Philippe Odier. Other than typical American items like bagels and doughnuts, a hungry patron won't find anything on the shelves that wouldn't fit in at any Parisian bakery. Even the bread is made according to a traditional French recipe, containing nothing other than flour, water, yeast and salt.

"We do everything from scratch," he said.

His speciality is the croissant. Odier takes great pride in pointing out that Duxbury residents who have been to Paris say his flaky croissants are superior to any one would find in the French capital.

For Odier, running the front office aspect of his new business came easily, having watched his father manage the front of the shop as well as the kitchen. But while he says he loves both baking and business, as the popularity of the bakery expanded, it became more and more difficult for Odier to juggle all his duties.

In 1999, he hired Bruno Biagianti, who had been the executive pastry chef at the Ritz in Boston and Paris, to run the kitchen.

"He had exactly the same ideas that I had," Odier said.

The business also expanded. While Duxbury remains the flagship store, the Odiers also own another French Memories, which opened last November in Sharon, as well as two restaurants called Cafe Vanille, one on Charter Street in Boston and one in the Chestnut Hill Mall. Although the expansions have been successful, Odier says he'll never mass-market his creations.

"It will never be a chain," he said. "It's difficult to keep the quality of the product."

On Aug. 14, the bakery celebrated its 20th anniversary. They were also listed as "Best of Boston" under the South category for Bakery, according to Boston magazine.

Through hard work and dedication, the Odiers and Biagianti have turned French Memories into a sweet delight in the heart of Duxbury's Snug Harbor.

"I always give it my all and work really hard," Odier said.